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Letter dated 28 March 2003 from the Permanent Representative of Armenia to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

In response to the letter dated 4 March 2003 from the Permanent Representative of Azerbaijan to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General and its annex, circulated as a document of the Security Council (S/2003/249), I have the honour to transmit herewith the memorandum entitled "The truth about the events in Khojaly: Evidence from Azerbaijani sources" (see annex).

I should be grateful if you would have the text of the present letter and its annex circulated as a document of the Security Council.

(*Signed*) Movses **Abelian**
Ambassador
Permanent Representative

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Annex to the letter dated 28 March 2003 from the Permanent Representative of Armenia to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

[Original: English]

The truth about events in Khojaly

Evidence from Azerbaijani sources

For 11 years after the events in Khojaly, official Baku has been obstinately fanning anti-Armenian hysteria with the aim of falsifying the real events and discrediting the Armenian people in the eyes of the international community.

The events in Khojaly, which led to the deaths of civilians, were the result solely of political intrigues and a struggle for power in Azerbaijan.

The real reasons are most convincingly reflected in the accounts of Azerbaijanis themselves — as participants in and eyewitnesses of what happened — as well as of those who know the whole inside story of the events in Baku.

According to Azerbaijani journalist M. Safarogly, "Khojaly occupied an important strategic position. The loss of Khojaly was a political fiasco for Mutalibov".[1]

Khojaly, along with Shusha and Agdam, was one of the main strongholds from which Stepanakert, the capital of the Nagorny Karabakh Republic, was shelled continuously and mercilessly for three winter months with artillery and missiles and launchers used for targeting cities.

Knocking out the weapon emplacements in Khojaly and freeing the airport were the only way for the Nagorny Karabakh Republic to ensure the physical survival of a population condemned by Azerbaijan to complete annihilation. The daily shelling of Stepanakert from nearby Khojaly took the lives of hundreds of peaceful inhabitants — women, children and old people.

Former President of Azerbaijan Ayaz Mutalibov has stated that "the assault on Khojaly was not a surprise attack".[2] In a *Nezavisimaya gazeta* newspaper interview he emphasized that "a corridor was kept open by the Armenians for people to leave".[3] However, a column of civilians was fired on by armed units of the Popular Front of Azerbaijan on the approaches to the Agdam district border, a fact later confirmed by Ayaz Mutalibov, who linked this criminal act to attempts by the opposition to remove him from power, and blamed it entirely for what happened. In his interview with *Novoye vremya* magazine, Mutalibov stated that "the shooting of the Khojaly residents was obviously organized by someone to take control in Azerbaijan".[4]

Similar comments and views concerning the events in Khojaly are known to have been made by several other highly placed Azerbaijani officials and journalists.

There is, moreover, the conclusion of Azerbaijani journalist Arif Yunusov, which differs somewhat from the previous statements: "The town and its inhabitants were deliberately sacrificed for a political purpose — to prevent the Popular Front

of Azerbaijan from coming to power".[5] In this case, though, the Azerbaijanis themselves are named as the perpetrators of the tragedy.

What resulted from the betrayal of the inhabitants of Khojaly by their own high ranking compatriots is well known. Azerbaijani propaganda has railed to the whole world about the "atrocities of the Armenians", supplying television stations with horrendous pictures of a field strewn with mutilated bodies. Khojaly is claimed to have been "the Armenians' revenge for Sumgait".

Tamerlan Karayev, at one time Chairman of the Supreme Council of the Republic of Azerbaijan, bears witness: "The tragedy was committed by the authorities of Azerbaijan", and specifically by "someone highly placed".[6]

The Czech journalist Jana Mazalova, who by an oversight of the Azerbaijanis was included in both of the groups of press representatives to be shown the bodies mutilated by "the Armenians", noted a substantial difference in the two cases. When she went to the scene immediately after the events, Mazalova did not see any traces of barbarous treatment of the bodies. Yet a couple of days later the journalists were shown disfigured bodies already "prepared" for taping.

Who killed the peaceful inhabitants of Khojaly and then mutilated their bodies, if the tragedy occurred not in a village taken by Armenians or on the route of the humanitarian corridor, but on the approaches to the town of Agdam — on the territory fully controlled by the Popular Front of Azerbaijan?

The independent Azerbaijani cameraman Chingiz Mustafaev, who took pictures on 28 February and 2 March 1992, had doubts about the official Azerbaijani version and began his own inquiry. The journalist's very first report to the Moscow news agency D-Press on the possible complicity of the Azerbaijani side in the crimes cost Mustafaev his life: he was killed not far from Agdam under circumstances that are still unexplained.

The current President of Azerbaijan, Heydar Aliyev, himself recognized that Azerbaijan's "former leadership were also guilty" of the events in Khojaly. Already in April 1992, according to the agency Bilik-Dunyasy, he had commented as follows: "The bloodshed will be to our advantage. We should not interfere in the course of events". To whose "advantage" was the bloodletting is clear to everyone. *Megapolis-Express* wrote: "It cannot be denied that if the Popular Front of Azerbaijan actually set far-reaching objectives, they have been achieved. Mutalibov has been compromised and overthrown, public opinion worldwide has been shaken, and the Azerbaijanis and their Turkish brethren have believed in the so-called genocide of the Azerbaijani people in Khojaly".[7]

One other tragic detail. It has become clear since the events that 47 Armenian hostages were already being held on 26 February in "peaceful" Khojaly, a fact that the Azerbaijani mass media "covering" the tragedy have failed to mention. After the liberation of Khojaly only 13 hostages (including 6 women and 1 child) were found there, the other 34 having been taken away by the Azerbaijanis to an unknown location. The only thing known about them is that they were led from the village on the night of the operation, but never reached Agdam. There is still no information concerning what eventually happened to them or confirming that they continued to be held captive by the Azerbaijanis.

Obviously, those who wanted to create the impression that bodies had been mutilated by the Armenians first of all disfigured the bodies of those same Armenian hostages, in order to make it impossible to identify them. Precisely for that purpose the outer clothing was removed from many of the bodies, and precisely for that reason the bodies of the unfortunate victims were damaged so badly that they became unrecognizable.

In the light of the above facts it may confidently be said that the killing of peaceful inhabitants of the village of Khojaly and of the Armenian hostages being held there was the work of the Azerbaijani side, which committed this crime against its own people in the name of political intrigues and the struggle for power.

Notes

[1] *Nezavisimaya gazeta* newspaper, February 1993.

[2] *Ogonyok* magazine, Nos. 14-15, 1992.

[3] *Nezavisimaya gazeta* newspaper, 2 April 1992.

[4] *Novoye vremya* newspaper, 6 March 2001.

[5] *Zerkalo* newspaper, July 1992.

[6] *Mikhalifat* newspaper, 28 April 1992.

[7] *Megapolis-Express*, No. 17, 1992.